

Tull: Father Coughlin and the New Deal

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he realizes this would be a task which he is not competent to perform. His purpose is only to point out some of the book's more obvious shortcomings.

To sum up then, the data upon which the book is based are outdated and sometimes completely inaccurate. The conclusions which the author comes to are supported only by those facts which he chooses to consider, not by all the facts as they exist. The book is an important one, in that it will undoubtedly be used as a weapon by the opponents of the urban renewal program. It is not a book which will give the reader a true picture of the program.

The World Health Organization has been quoted recently as declaring: "After the question of keeping world peace, metropolitan planning is probably the most important single problem faced by man in the second half of the 20th century."¹⁹ It is a problem from which this country is not exempt. Certainly a critical analysis of our urban renewal program will be of great value in coming to grips with this challenge. The Urban Renewal Program, like every other governmental program, has known both success and failure. However, a study which ignores the program's achievements and merely distorts its failures is of as little value as a study which dwells on its successes and glosses over its defects.

THOMAS GRIPPANDO*

¹⁹ Hughes, *The Crisis in Cities*, 110 CONG. RECORD 4864 (1964).

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Father Coughlin and the New Deal. By CHARLES J. TULL. Syracuse: Syracuse, University Press, 1965. Notes, Index. Pp. 292. \$6.50.

Charles J. Tull, Assistant Professor of History at De Paul University, has made a sufficient contribution to the "Men and Movements" series of Syracuse University. His subject emerges from these pages as a prophet who, but for his inability to control his own petty weakness, might have grown with his country. Instead Charles E. Coughlin was unable to balance his influences, and to discriminate against the tremendous social, political and economic forces of depression-ridden America. In the late years of his life, Father Coughlin swung in a wild erratic course, without philosophy or balance. With each turn, he went further beyond the guideposts of constructive and conventional thinking.

It is evident upon reading the book that Professor Tull thoroughly researched his subject. His descriptive sequence of events relies only on objective material. The speeches, writings and actions of the controversial Radio Priest are founded upon ascertainable research rather than upon interpretation.

The ultimate picture of Father Coughlin remains as erratic and inconsistent today as it was thirty years ago. Father Coughlin deemed himself a force early in the depression. In truth, he was a force in America and as a matter of fact a remarkably constructive force. Few people today recall the Coughlin proposal, which was suggested prior to any "New Deal" enactments, that the United States government provide a permanent flexible job pool and offer employment, without strings, through prosperity or depression, for all individuals who were out of work. This concept of Father Coughlin's has as much validity today as it did when advanced. It is illustrative of Father Coughlin's ability and far sightedness, qualities manifest during his early years

on the radio. The book makes an excellent study of Father Coughlin's activities, including his highly successful attacks upon the Roosevelt Gold Program, the 1938 court expansion plan and the proposed Neutrality Repeal of 1939. There is also in this work, a concurrent story of the subject's gradual loss of touch with the realities of the day. The book discusses his single and almost ludicrous venture into international politics when he advocated the social justice community, in effect an attempt to form a third party. His candidate received fewer than a million votes—a complete fiasco as was the Henry Wallace attempt twelve years later. The tragedy of Father Coughlin, which like his successes, is judiciously understated by Professor Tull, was his inability to accept the failures of his social campaigns. With each apparent failure of a project, Father Coughlin further embraced the reactionary, the anti-Semitic, the pro-German and the other seething “anti-liberal” elements of society. As he became more deeply meshed in anti-Semitic, and later even anti-democratic groups, his voice became shrill and strident, and thus his effectiveness was lessened.

The story written by Professor Tull contains the outlines of an almost classic tragedy, a man destroyed by his own nature. He was a gifted man of considerable vision, genuinely concerned with the welfare of his parishioners and their fellow men; but he was ruined by lack of discernment—the vital characteristic of an effective social thinker.

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